Monsters Read Objects; Heroes Read Relations

Gom-Agahi, Myth, and the Topology That Preceded Mathematics

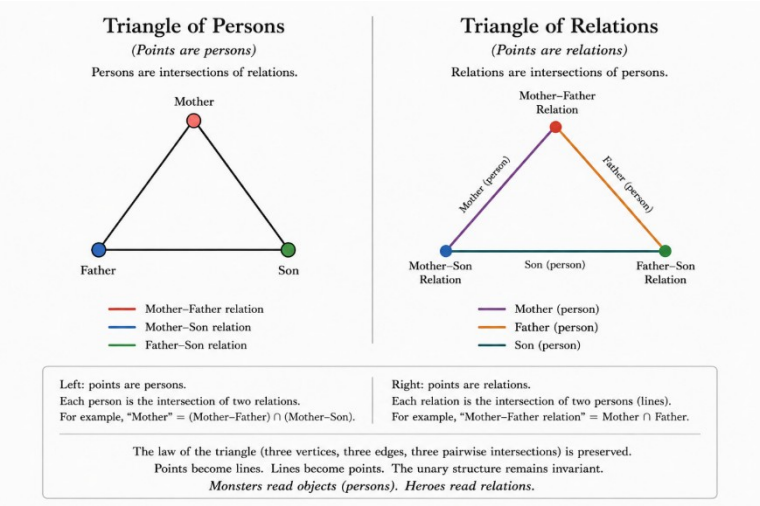
Iraj Esmaeilpour Ghoochani

This essay continues an argument developed in my Persian article "*Gom-Agahi, Part Two*", available at: گم آگاهی. (1) قسمت دوم . There I introduced the concept of ***Gom-Agahi*** (گم‌آگـــاهی), which I translate as *Lost-Consciousness*. I deliberately avoid the established psychoanalytic term *the unconscious***.** *Gom-Agahi* does not designate a hidden region of the mind lying beneath consciousness. It refers instead to a structural operation internal to consciousness itself: the moment when something disappears from explicit representation while continuing to organize the field from the very place of its disappearance. *Lost-Consciousness* is therefore neither ignorance nor repression. It is not what consciousness never knew, but what consciousness loses in the very act of understanding. A distinction vanishes as an object only to return as a *relation*. An order disappears from representation only to reappear as *orientation*. A forgotten difference no longer presents itself directly, yet it continues to bend the entire symbolic field around its absence. This is almost a topological image of *Lost-Consciousness*: Something is removed from explicit representation, yet it continues to organize the field from the place of its removal. **The missing order becomes orientation; the forgotten difference becomes twist.** What is lost as an object returns as an operator. Consciousness does not simply lose something; it begins to think according to the topology produced by that loss.

The previous essay approached this problem through the navel, the Lacanian lamella, Georges Perec's *La Disparition*, Ferdinand de Saussure's anagrams, and Fethi Benslama's reading of the **ḥarf** as the edge of the body. The argument developed there was that the missing element never truly withdraws from the structure. Instead, it changes its mode of existence. It ceases to appear as a visible object and begins to act as the invisible principle organizing the relations among objects.

The present essay extends that argument in an unexpected direction. It proposes that mythology had already discovered this topology long before mathematics gave it diagrams, quotient spaces, Möbius strips, Klein bottles, or formulas.

What topology later formalized, myth had already learned to narrate. The stories of Rostam and Akvan Div, Odysseus and Polyphemus, and Chesterton's *The Queer Feet* are not merely literary examples of an abstract theory. They are themselves descriptive models of relational thinking. They demonstrate that the decisive difference between the monster and the hero is not intelligence, strength, or even language. It is the capacity to read **relations instead of objects**. That is the central thesis of this essay: **Monsters read objects. Heroes read relations.**


Triangle of Persons
(Points are persons)
Persons are intersections of relations.
Mother
Father
Son
Mother–Father relation
Mother–Son relation
Father–Son relation
Triangle of Relations
(Points are relations)
Relations are intersections of persons.
Mother–Father Relation
Mother (person)
Father (person)
Mother–Son Relation
Son (person)
Father–Son Relation
Mother (person)
Father (person)
Son (person)
Left: points are persons.
Each person is the intersection of two relations.
For example, "Mother" = (Mother–Father) ∩ (Mother–Son).
Right: points are relations.
Each relation is the intersection of two persons (lines).
For example, "Mother–Father relation" = Mother ∩ Father.
The law of the triangle (three vertices, three edges, three pairwise intersections) is preserved.
Points become lines. Lines become points. The unary structure remains invariant.
Monsters read objects (persons). Heroes read relations.

The inversion proposed in Figure 1 is not confined to kinship. It belongs to a much older intuition concerning the relation between Word and Flesh. In ordinary waking reality, words appear to refer to bodies as though language merely named an independently existing world. Dreams reverse this ontology. They are not populated by objects but by relations that have assumed bodily form. Freud therefore described the dream as a *Rebus*: neither writing nor image alone, but a singular condensation in which Word and Flesh temporarily become indistinguishable. The dream does not abandon reality. It reads it according to another order. What waking life presents as objects, the dream presents as transformations. The same unary law persists beneath both readings. A dream is a space in which relations become more real than the objects they relate. Consequently, The hero is the one who reads waking life according to the logic of the dream.

Ethnotopology (as well as *Mardomkavi*) is not an application of mathematics to myth; mathematics is a later formalization of operations that myths had already discovered. This mathematical movement gives a rigorous sense to the proposition that ***monsters read objects while heroes read relations***. The difference is not that the hero possesses more objects, more information, or greater intelligence. The difference lies in the order of reading. The monster attends to the terms that appear before him; the hero reads the transformation through which one term is carried into another. The monster sees A and B. The hero asks what happens along the path A → B, and why this path cannot simply be reversed. Thus AB ≠ BA does not mean that the objects A and B have changed. It simply means that a relation has an orientation, that a passage retains the history of its traversal, and that the reverse path may not restore the initial condition. In a commutative world, the points alone matter. In a noncommutative world, the way one arrives matters as much as the place at which one arrives. Myth knew this long before the relation was written in an algebraic formula.[1]

[1] The mathematical form of this argument becomes visible in the topology of unordered pairs. Imagine all possible pairs of points on a closed curve. At first, the pair ((a,b)) is treated as distinct from ((b,a)), and the field of ordered pairs can be represented by a torus. But in the proof concerning inscribed rectangles, this distinction must be forgotten. A diagonal of a rectangle does not change merely because its two endpoints are named in the reverse order; therefore ((a,b)) and ((b,a)) must be identified. Locally, we declare that (ab=ba). Yet this apparent commutativity does not produce a flat and innocent symmetry. When the field is folded along the diagonal (a=b) and the

The encounter of Odysseus and Polyphemus provides an almost exact mythological performance of this noncommutativity. When Odysseus calls himself Οὖτις, “Nobody,” he does not merely choose a cunning false name. He constructs an oriented path through two regimes of language. For Polyphemus, Οὖτις moves from sound to proper name:

$$\text{Οὖτις} \rightarrow \text{Name}.$$

When the wounded Cyclops cries out to the others, however, the same sound passes into another position and becomes the negation of an agent:

$$\text{Οὖτις} \rightarrow \text{Nobody}.$$

The objects appear to be identical. The same phonetic sequence is heard. But the relations are not. What is a name in one symbolic position becomes the absence of a subject in another. Odysseus is able to move from the function of name toward the function of nobody, but Polyphemus cannot travel back from “nobody” to the hidden proper name. He tries to reverse the path, but the road is no longer reversible:

$$\text{Name} \rightarrow \text{Nobody} \neq \text{Nobody} \rightarrow \text{Name}$$

This is not merely a pun or an ambiguity. It is a mythological justification of $AB \neq BA$. The signifier is the same, but the trajectory is not. Polyphemus reads the object “Nobody.” Odysseus reads the relation between naming and negation. The Cyclops is not defeated because he lacks language. He is defeated because he assumes that a signifier can be returned to its origin simply by following the same line in reverse. He does not recognize that the passage has already twisted the field: the signifier has always a *twist*.

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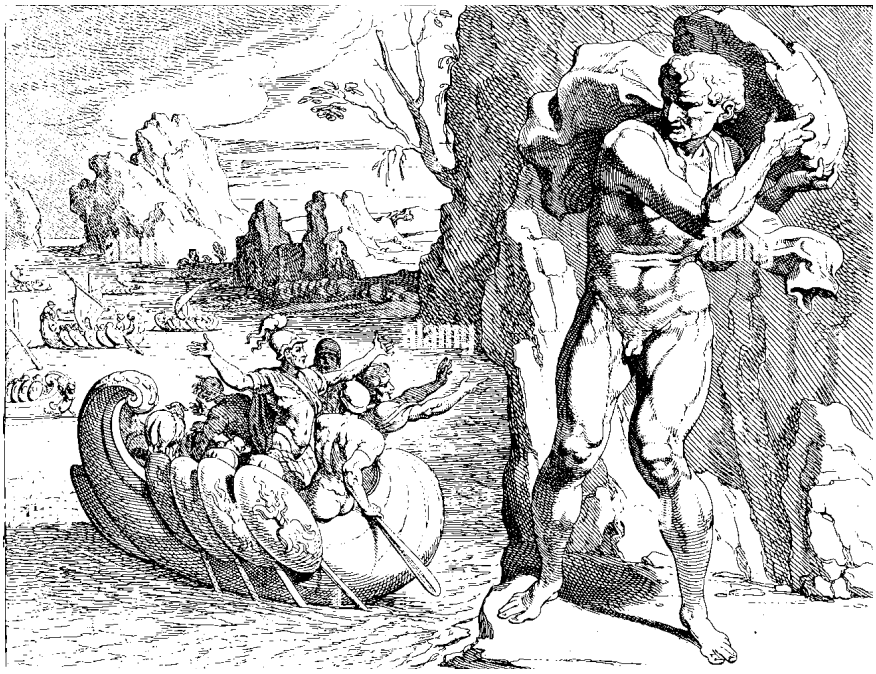
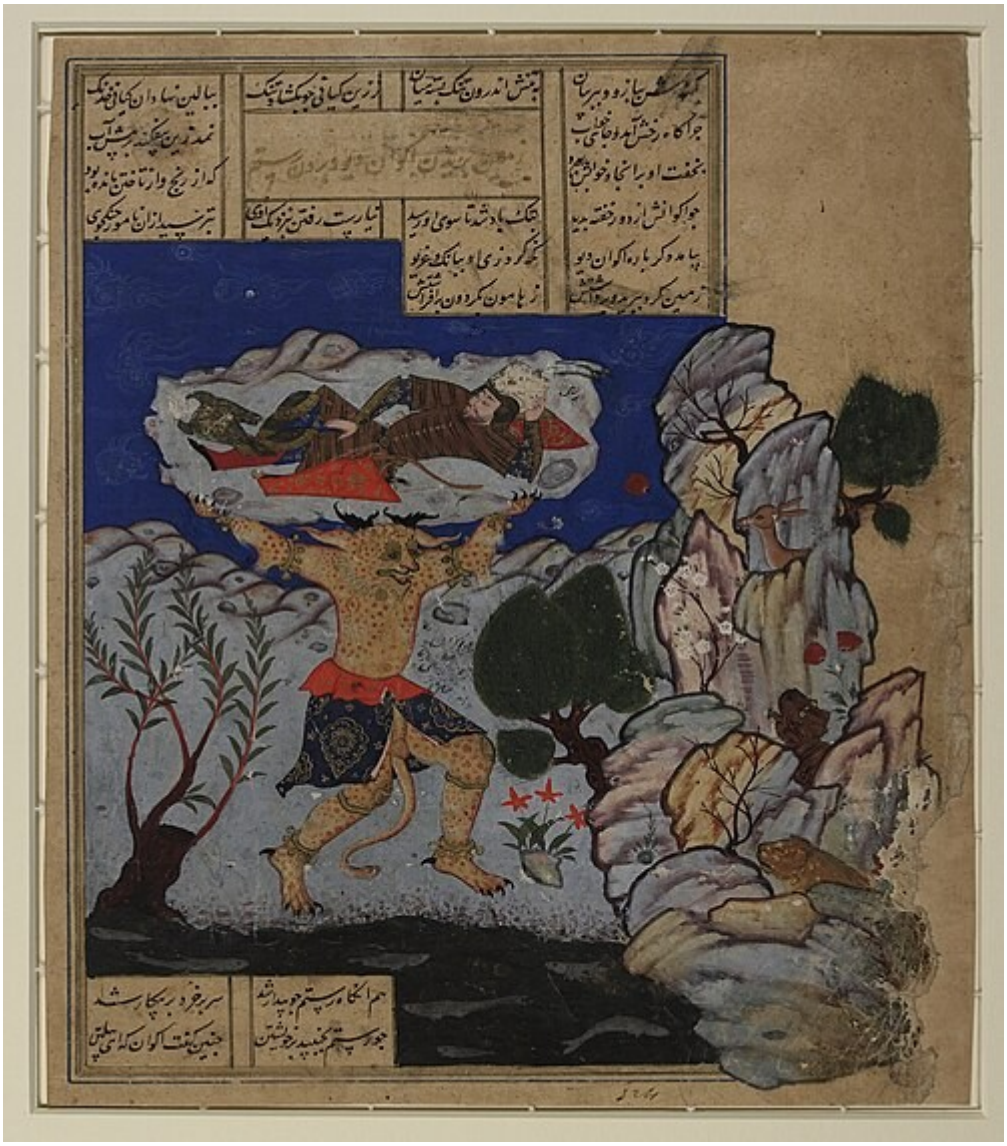
reflected points are identified, the remaining edges can be joined only through a half-twist. The field of unordered pairs becomes a Möbius strip. What has been removed as explicit information—the order of the two points—returns globally as non-orientability. Forgetting the order does not eliminate it without remainder. The forgotten distinction becomes the twist of the whole surface. This is the logic of *Gom-Agahi*: an element is lost at the level of representation, but the field begins to bend around that loss. What disappears from the list of objects survives as the law of their relation. Don. Kunze`s and my discussion follows Grant Sanderson's remarkably lucid topological exposition of Herbert Vaughan's proof for the inscribed rectangle problem (Sanderson 2024), rather than the original mathematical presentation (Vaughan 1992). Sanderson's visualization is particularly valuable because it demonstrates how non-orientable surfaces such as the Möbius strip and Klein bottle emerge naturally from the problem itself rather than being introduced as abstract curiosities. This observation resonates strongly with the argument developed here: mathematics often formalizes structures that myths had already begun to narrate.

Sources: Vaughan, Herbert. "Rectangles and Simple Closed Curves." *Topology Proceedings* **17** (1992): 279–295.

Grant Sanderson. (2024, December 24). *This open problem taught me what topology is* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQqtsm-bBRU



The giant Polyphemus throws a rock at the departing ship of Odysseus.



This painting represents an episode described in Firdawsi's "Shahnamah" (The Book of Kings), the epic story of ancient kings and heroes of Persia composed by the renowned author during the first decades of the 11th century. The text on the fragments recto and verso describes the painting. King Khusraw summons Rustam to help him stop a demon (div) disguised as a wild ass that is ravaging of the royal herds. After three days of unsuccessful battle, the hero falls asleep in the grass. Thereupon, the Div Akvan casts aside his disguise, resumes his demonic form, rushes towards Rustam, and digs up the ground around the hero. He gives Rustam the choice of being thrown against the mountains, to be eaten by lions and onagers, or cast into the sea, where he would drown to his death. Knowing that the enemy would do the exact opposite and realizing that, if cast to the sea, he would have a chance to swim to survival, he asked to be thrown against the mountains. Rustam is cast to the sea, swims back to the shore, and returns to defeat the demon in combat. Source.

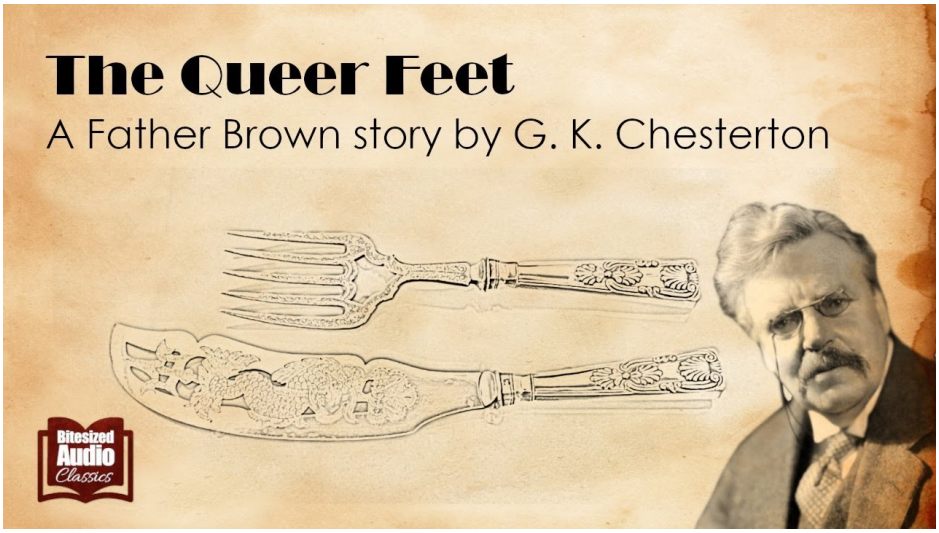
The structure of *Akvan Div* is different but homologous, and its importance for Persianate culture lies precisely in the fact that it does not merely reproduce the Greek logic. *Akvan* asks *Rostam* whether he wishes to be thrown into the sea or onto the mountain. On the surface, two objects are offered: water and land. A conventional reading says that *Rostam* tricks the demon by naming the opposite of what he wants. Yet this remains too close to the objects themselves, as though the decisive issue were the correct selection between two destinations. *Rostam* does not merely choose one object while pronouncing the other. He reads the

orientation between desire and statement. He knows that *Akvan* is compelled to negate the expressed wish of the other. The demon therefore operates upon the sentence but has no access to the *desire* that produced it. *Rostam* desires *water* and says *mountain*. *Akvan* hears *mountain* and produces its opposite. The demon believes that he has reversed *Rostam's* will, but he has reversed only *Rostam's* statement. The path from desire to statement is not equivalent to the path from statement back to desire:

$$\text{Desire} \rightarrow \text{Statement} \neq \text{Statement} \rightarrow \text{Desire}$$

Akvan reads the two objects—*water* and *mountain*—and exchanges them mechanically. *Rostam* reads the twist by which one becomes the other. The demon reads the coordinates (y=1/x). The hero reads the quotient operation (rotates the map of y=1/x for 90 degrees). *Akvan* knows the rule (S maps to -S), but he does not know that *Rostam* has incorporated this rule into the production of his own *sentence*. He is imprisoned inside an operation that the hero observes from another level. His inversion is therefore not genuine relational intelligence; it is compulsion. He traverses the twist but cannot perceive the surface on which he moves.

This difference gives a sharper formulation to Lacan's sentence from *L'Étourdit*: "*That one might be saying remains forgotten behind what is said in what is understood*." The forgotten element is not hidden behind the *sentence* as a secret content waiting to be uncovered. It is forgotten through the very success of *understanding*. *Akvan* understands the statement "mountain" and therefore misses the saying that has organized this statement around the demon's own compulsion. The other Cyclopes also *understand* "Nobody" and therefore *miss* the act of naming concealed within the negation. *Understanding* becomes a mechanism of *loss*. It grasps the object while dropping the relation. *Gom-Agahi* names this missed dimension: not what consciousness has never possessed, but what consciousness loses in the very act of converting a relation into an object of *understanding*.



Chesterton's *The Queer Feet* adds a third and more complex stage because the central figure is no longer a monster who cannot read the interval. The thief already knows that the social world contains more than one symbolic orientation. He passes between *waiter* and *gentleman*, not merely by changing clothing but by changing gait, rhythm, pace, and entitlement. The same *body* becomes legible under two incompatible social grammars. As a waiter, the feet move quickly,

quietly, and responsively; as a gentleman, the same feet move with leisure, assurance, and the expectation of service. The thief does not remain trapped inside one symbolic position. He consciously exploits the passage between them. In this sense he possesses a heroic intelligence, although he uses it for theft: he reads relations rather than isolated roles. He knows that "*waiter*" and "*gentleman*" are not substantial identities residing inside bodies. They are relational orientations within a field.

Father Brown, however, occupies a still more reflexive position. He does not become either *waiter* or *gentleman* and does not merely recognise that the two appearances belong to one person. He hears the transition. Everyone else hears footsteps as objects: one step, another step, a person moving through a corridor. Father Brown hears the operation connecting one rhythm to the next:

… Waiter → Gentelman → Waiter …

The arrows are the clue. The feet are only their material inscription.[2] Father Brown reads the footnotes of society because he listens beneath the declared identities to the rhythm of their transformations. He hears neither servant nor master as isolated objects. He hears the twist by which the same body passes from service to privilege and back again. The social field becomes audible as a noncommutative surface: the movement from *waiter* to *gentleman* is not simply the reverse of *gentleman* to *waiter*, because each passage carries a different presupposition, risk, tempo, and relation to the gaze of others.

The progression can now be stated more precisely. The Cyclops cannot perceive the interval because he is enclosed within explicit meaning. *Akvan* inhabits the interval compulsively but cannot recognize the structure that compels him. The thief perceives the interval and exploits it consciously. Father Brown reads the transition as transition. Each position belongs to a different logical order. The Cyclops reads the sign. *Akvan* performs the rule. The thief manipulates the field. Father Brown reconstructs the field from its traces.

Don Kunze's reflection on the contronym makes this point especially clear. A contronym is not simply a word possessing two opposite dictionary meanings. Its force arises when a circuit is completed and the second meaning retroactively changes the first. The sequence AB is not equivalent to BA, because B does not merely come after A; it returns to reorganize what A will have meant. This is the logic of *après-coup*. A spoonerism such as "funny bone" becoming "bunny phone" is not illuminating merely because two sounds are exchanged. Its humour depends on the sudden construction of a relation that was not present as an object in either phrase. The nonsense formation returns upon the initial phrase and opens a hollow point within it. The first expression becomes readable differently only after the second has appeared. Meaning is produced by the circuit, not stored inside either endpoint.

The same retroactive structure governs the myths. Odysseus' "*Nobody*" becomes fully effective only when Polyphemus repeats it to the other Cyclopes. The second scene rewrites the first. *Rostam's* word "*mountain*" becomes intelligible only after *Akvan* performs the compulsory negation that *Rostam* had already anticipated. The action of the demon retrospectively reveals what *Rostam's* statement was doing. In *The Queer Feet*, the gentleman's gait becomes

[2] The expression foot-notes (as well as "between the lines") is structurally exact here. A footnote lies beneath the principal text; a foot-note is the note (music) produced by a foot.

suspicious only after it is placed beside the waiter's gait; each rhythm retroactively alters the meaning of the other. The relation completes the sign. What appeared first as an object becomes, after the circuit, one orientation of a twisted field.

This is why *Gom-Agahi* (lost-consciousness)should not be translated too quickly as simply "the unconscious." The English term often suggests a separate region of the psyche containing representations inaccessible to consciousness. *Gom-Agahi* points instead toward an operation of losing that occurs within consciousness itself. Something is *missed* because it has been converted from an explicit distinction into the orientation of a field. The order of the pair disappears, but returns as the twist of the Möbius strip. The name disappears, but returns as the efficacy of "*Nobody*." *Rostam's* desire disappears from his statement, but returns as the law governing *Akvan's* act. The thief's identity disappears behind two roles, but returns in the impossible transition heard by Father Brown. What is lost is not elsewhere. It is present as structure. We can now formulate the proposition rigorously: ***Monsters read objects. Heroes read relations.***

The monster sees the terms and believes that the structure is exhausted by them. The hero reads the path, the orientation, the transformation, the delay, the inversion, and the return. The monster assumes that reversing the objects reverses the relation. The hero knows that AB ≠ BA. He knows that the same endpoints can belong to different trajectories and that an apparently commutative identification may generate a globally non-orientable field. The monster recognises the coordinates. The hero recognises the twist.

Mardomkavi, understood in this sense, is not a search for hidden meanings behind words. It reads the operations by which meanings change position. It does not ask only what a word signifies, but what route it travels, what it becomes in another mouth, what *disappears* when it is *understood*, what returns through repetition, and what difference becomes embodied in the field after being removed from explicit representation. Its object is neither the isolated signifier nor the private intention of the speaker. Its object is the topology through which one becomes the other without ever being simply reversible.

Mathematics was therefore already present in myth, not as numbers awaiting discovery, but as relations awaiting notation. The stories of Odysseus, *Rostam*, *Akvan*, Polyphemus, the thief, and Father Brown are descriptive materials of an ethnotopology: they show orientation before orientation is diagrammed, quotient operations before quotient spaces are named, noncommutativity before it is written as AB ≠ BA, and the Möbius twist before paper is folded. Myth does not calculate the structure. It makes the structure live.

Addendum: Why Identity Is Already Relational

The present essay has argued that monsters read objects whereas heroes read relations. This proposition presupposes another thesis developed earlier, namely that the object itself is never completely identical with itself. The relation does not merely connect two already constituted identities. Identity is already traversed by relation. This argument was developed in my earlier essay **A≠A**, available here:

https://www.academia.edu/101624721/A_A

There I argued that identity should not be understood as the logical tautology

$$A=A,$$

but rather as a continuous displacement

$$A\neq A.$$

The point is not that identity fails. Rather, identity exists only through its own internal deviation. Every identity must leave itself, traverse a difference, and return to itself through another position. Hegel's critique of the empty tautology A=A, Žižek's famous distinction between *coffee without milk* and *coffee without cream*, the linguistic threshold separating *Geld* from *Gold*, and the continual circulation between *Word* and *Flesh* all point toward the same conclusion: *what appears identical is sustained by an irreducible internal asymmetry.*

The present essay extends this argument topologically. If identity itself is already folded ($A\neq A$), then the passage between two identities can no longer be assumed to be reversible. The path $A\to B$ cannot simply be inverted into $B\to A$. Thus, $AB\neq BA$. This non-commutativity is not merely an algebraic curiosity. It is precisely what myths have been describing for centuries.

The Hero Traverses His Own Relation. In this Anatolian miniature from the *Falnāma* (Book of Omens), Imam ʿAlī is depicted carrying his own coffin upon a camel. The image should not be understood merely as a miracle or a prophecy. It stages a more fundamental inversion. The living man and the dead body are no longer two separate objects connected by death; they become two positions within a single relation already traversed by the hero himself. The hero therefore appears simultaneously at both ends of the journey. He is both the guide and the one being carried, both subject and object, both actor and witness. Death no longer confronts him as an external event because he has already crossed the interval that others still experience as a separation. Like Odysseus, who moves from name to "Nobody," like *Rostam*, who reads the path from desire to statement rather than the alternatives themselves, and like Father Brown, who hears the transition rather than the footsteps, the hero inhabits the relation instead of its endpoints.

Postscript: The Topology of Traversal

The central claim of this essay has been that monsters read objects whereas heroes read relations. A classical result from the theory of infinite series offers a striking mathematical analogue—not because it proves the present thesis, but because it exhibits the same structural principle.

Consider the conditionally convergent alternating harmonic series:

$$(1-1)+\left(\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}\right)+\left(\frac{1}{3}-\frac{1}{3}\right)+\cdots=0.$$

Now traverse the very same terms along a different path:

$$1+\frac{1}{2}-1+\frac{1}{3}+\frac{1}{4}-\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{5}+\frac{1}{6}-\frac{1}{3}+\cdots=\ln 2.$$

Nothing has been added. Nothing has been removed. The symbolic field remains identical. Only the path of traversal has changed, yet the global result is no longer the same.[3]

This phenomenon should not be confused with the non-commutativity discussed throughout this essay. It demonstrates something more general. A field is not exhausted by its elements. Under certain conditions, the order in which those elements are traversed becomes constitutive of the whole. The path itself becomes an operator.

The myths discussed here obey the same logic. Odysseus, Rostam, Father Brown, and even the dream-work do not discover hidden objects that the monster cannot see. They traverse the same symbolic field differently. The monster assumes that identical elements necessarily produce an identical world. The hero knows that reality depends upon the route through which those elements are related.

The lesson is therefore neither algebraic nor merely literary. It is topological. **The same world, traversed differently, need not remain the same world.**

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[3] The mathematical example discussed here concerns the *Riemann Rearrangement Theorem* rather than the non-commutativity of multiplication. Strictly speaking, it does not prove AB≠BA (Or maybe it does in its most general way). Instead, it demonstrates a more general structural principle: a conditionally convergent infinite series may converge to different values when the *same terms* are traversed in different orders. Nothing is added and nothing is removed; only the path through the sequence changes, yet the global result changes accordingly. In the present essay, this theorem is not invoked as a proof of the mythological argument but as a rigorous analogue of its central intuition: that the identity of the elements does not exhaust the structure they generate. The hero, unlike the monster, does not encounter different objects but traverses the same symbolic field differently. Readers wishing to explore the mathematical phenomenon itself may consult the entry *"Riemann Rearrangement Theorem"* in the *Encyclopedia of Mathematics* (https://encyclopediaofmath.org/wiki/Riemann_theorem) or the article *"Riemann Series Theorem"* in *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riemann_series_theorem). A classical mathematical treatment can also be found in Walter Rudin, *Principles of Mathematical Analysis*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw–Hill, 1976), Chapter 3, and Tom M. Apostol, *Calculus*, Vol. I, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1991), §13.